

suffer. It is reasonable to assume therefore that, as in the case of many benefits which China is now offering the worker, birth control is regarded in Peking as a method of strengthening the present labour force, with the goal—as ever—of swift industrialization.

It seems true to conclude that if family planning (four children is officially mentioned as an ideal number) is a permanent policy in China, it can be one of the Peking Government's best arguments to show it is not expansionist.⁴

Abortions Rise in Russia

Minister of Health Maria D. Kovrigina reported a sharp increase in abortions this year since the Soviet government lifted its ban on the operation.

Many abortions still are being performed privately outside of hospitals, Mrs. Kovrigina said, because of long delays and overburdened hospitals and the fear of publicity in legal abortions.

She said Soviet medicine had been backward in providing birth control methods and called for an intensified campaign to spread birth control information as a means of reducing the abortion toll.⁵

The Human Life Span

It is a salutary commentary on the superficial impact of medical progress on the biological history of man that, in spite of all the advances achieved, the characteristic life-span of man under optimal conditions is still around the Scriptural estimate of three score years and ten, with a limit of somewhere between 100 and 120 years. All that medicine has achieved—and no one would deny that it is a notable achievement—has been the eradication of an increasing number of pathological causes of death, so that an increasing number of people now survive into the seventy to eighty years' age groups. The fundamental biological problem of senescence is still unsolved.⁶

¹ *Star*, September 24th, 1956.

² *The Statist*, September.

³ *The Times*, October 23rd.

⁴ *Scotsman*, September 24th.

⁵ *New York Herald Tribune*, October 25th.

⁶ *The Times*, October 19th.

CORRESPONDENCE

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The Designation of Uncommon Families

To the Editor, Eugenics Review.

SIR,—Dr. Eliot Slater, in a letter published in the October 1956 number of the *REVIEW*, has commented adversely on Dr. Blacker's suggestion for the designation of uncommon families. Such designation, he says, would be without scientific validity because of difficulties of definition and delimitation; it might be ridiculed if "the moron descendant of distinguished ancestors"—an exceptional case that would be expected to occur only occasionally—prided himself on his membership of a designated family.

It seems to me that there is a simple answer to Dr. Slater. The designation of problem families is open to just the same kind of objections, and yet the identification and study of such families is a well-established procedure, the value of which is widely accepted. There must surely be less objection to finding the golden fleece than to identifying black sheep?

P. R. Cox.

Epsom,
Surrey.

To the Editor, Eugenics Review.

SIR,—Dr. Slater's letter really falls into two parts, though as he has written it they are not very clearly separated from one another. There is the matter of the inheritance of ability, and the question of devising some manner of "designation" of distinguished families.

As to the inheritance of ability, his letter taken by itself would seem almost to imply that Dr. Slater does not believe that human beings are subject even to the ordinary laws of genetics. Every study of genetics must encounter the difficulties he refers to. A breed of prize dogs must frequently produce pups that would never win a prize; nevertheless the breed continues to be valued for the obvious reason that experience shows that in such a breed the dogs that have won prizes will produce a greater number of prize-winning pups than the dogs that have failed to win prizes. It is quite useless to think about heredity without paying attention to probabilities, as every geneticist knows. It may be true that distinguished parents often produce inferior children, but surely any geneticist will believe that they are likely to produce a less proportion of them than are